DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 393 420 IR 017 756

AUTHOR Rezabek, Landra L.
TITLE Teaching with Distance Delivery Systems: Strategies from Alpha to Omega.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 6p.; In: Verbo-Visual Literacy: Understanding and Applying New Educational Communication Media Technologies. Selected Readings from the Symposium of the International Visual Literacy Association (Delphi, Greece, June 25-29, 1993); see IR 017 742.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Computer Mediated Communication; *Distance Education; *Educational Strategies; Electronic Classrooms; Electronic Mail; Elementary Secondary Education; Nontraditional Education; Outreach Programs; *Teacher Attitudes; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS Access to Persons

ABSTRACT

Distance education can assume many forms, including videotaped lectures, computer-mediated communication among teacher and student, and instantaneous, live two-way interaction. This paper focuses on tips and strategies for educators wishing to expand their teaching repertoires to include the use of these technologies. Teacher strategies listed include: (1) assessing one's own attitude toward distance education; (2) working to overcome barriers of time and geography; (3) carefully preplanning group activities; (4) exercising determination; (5) frequently evaluating the program; (6) communicating zest to students; (7) overcoming the eerie feeling that no one is out there listening; (8) preparing thoughtfully and thoroughly; (9) taking time to foster interaction; (10) being patient with technological kinks; (11) staying learner-centered; (12) taking advantage of media; (13) making sure that distance education is implemented not because it is in vogue but because it addresses needs; (14) using xerography; (15) being organized; (16) being punctual; (17) giving students frequent repetitions of assignments, due dates, and key points; (18) keeping things simple; (19) leaning on institution-wide teamwork; (20) updating as technologies change; (21) recognizing aspects of one's educational philosophy that will translate well to the format; (21) maintaining a sense of humor; (22) uttering a well-timed "Pshaw!" now and then; and (23) remaining optimistic. (BEW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 393 420

TEACHING WITH DISTANCE DELIVERY SYSTEMS: STRATEGIES FROM A TO Ω

by
Landra L. Rezabek

Though nuances of the definition still are debated, the term *distance education* broadly refers to a wide variety of educational activities conducted when the source(s) and recipient(s) of the educational event are geographically or temporally separated (Garrison, 1990; Keegan, 1990). Distance educational can assume a variety of forms, from very traditional courses provided via videotaped lectures to computer-mediated communication among teachers and students that occurs when participants' schedules allow them to send and receive electronic messages. Though time-honored, print-based correspondence courses are indeed considered a form of distance education, developments in technological hardware and software provide means of instantaneous, live, two-way interaction among instructors and students. Technological advances now offer distance education participants communication options such as audio, audiographic, facsimile, compressed video, VSAT (Very Small Aperture Terminals), microwave, satellite, cable, computer-based, and a variety of other delivery systems. Indeed, distance delivery systems frequently are hybrid systems, taking advantage of the attributes of a variety of delivery technologies.

The focus of this paper, however, is not on the new delivery systems (for a concise overview see U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, 1989, Chapter 3). As with any type of educational hardware, distance delivery systems themselves serve as the tools of teaching and learning, not as the primary consideration. Though the attributes of distance delivery systems must be considered during the design and development of distanced education endeavors, traditional principles of instructional design and development continue to serve as the foundation for educational planning. However, participants using new technological delivery systems may require assistance in learning to engage successfully and serenely in distance teaching and learning. This paper focuses on tips and strategies for educators interested in expanding their teaching repertoires to include the use of distance delivery systems.

In honor of the nation of Greece, host country of the 1993 Symposium of the International Visual Literacy Association, strategies for teaching with distance delivery systems are associated with each letter of the Greek alphabet and are discussed below. Since many distance delivery systems are available, strategies are generic and can pertain to the use of both audio and visual systems incorporating either live or delayed communication with a variety of learners. This brief overview of strategies is merely an introduction to the many opportunities awaiting educators who engage in distance teaching.

Attitudes. Educators engaged in distance teaching must carefully assess their attitudes about distance education. Teacher predispositions can be a crucial factor determining the success or failure of distance programs. Attitudes of students, administrators, and other stakeholders are important as well, but an unhappy teacher forced into a distanced role can sabotage a program just as a committed teacher can contribute the energy and enthusiasm that leads to the success of the endeavor. Wise distance teachers know about both the strengths

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Alice D. Walker
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

IR017756

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

and limitations of distance education and believe it is a worthwhile endeavor.

Barriers. Distance teachers are overcoming barriers of time and geography, just by the nature of distance education. Other barriers, ranging from tight budgets to luddite colleagues to administrative red tape, often present obstacles to educators teaching at a distance. Wise distance teachers identify existing barriers and develop strategies for dealing with them, knowing that new barriers will arise to present additional challenges.

Groups. As the role of educator shifts from that of a dispenser of information to that of a facilitator, coach, and mentor, teachers are increasingly incorporating student group activities into the instructional process. Group assignments can be a challenge to arrange in a distanced context, but they can be a very beneficial element of the distanced educational experience. Careful preplanning, assignment of group roles and responsibilities, use of on-site facilitators, and frequent communication among group members and the instructor all support the inclusion of group work in distanced settings. Wise distance teachers take advantage of group options during instruction.

Determination. Distance teaching is not easy. Those who naively state that teaching at a distance is just like teaching in a face-to-face situation probably have never taught at a distance. However, distance teaching is not necessarily harder than *normal* teaching. It merely requires the determination to incorporate new teaching strategies and to modify traditional ones in a new type of learning environment. Wise distance teachers are determined to provide successful experience for their distanced students and will select strategies to do so.

Evaluation. Distance teaching requires that educators consistently evaluate not only the performance of their students, but the successes and limitations of the entire distance teaching experience. In a distanced context, teachers will want to evaluate their own performance; the appropriateness and effectiveness of the delivery systems; and the support received from administrators, staff, site facilitators, and technicians. Wise distance teachers will solicit assistance with evaluation of the many factors affecting the overall success of distanced teaching endeavors.

Zest. Just as a teacher's enthusiasm is contagious in a live classroom, a distanced teacher's zest is transmitted across geographical space and over time. Wise distance teachers will remember that their degree of zest for distance teaching and learning will be translated to students using audio or visual means and that students will perceive and often reflect that enthusiasm.

Eerie. Sometimes teaching at a distance may seem a little strange. Depending on the type of delivery system being used, a teacher may have the eerie feeling that no one is *out there* attending to instruction. Feedback is important to teachers as well as to students in order to combat an eerie sense of isolation. Teachers may also feel a little unsettled when working with new delivery technologies for the first few times, but comfort levels rapidly rise as teachers become accustomed to the hardware and to the strategies to take advantage of new teaching options. Wise distance educators realize that eerie feelings will be replaced

by a new sense of confidence in dealing with distanced teaching situations.

Thoughtful and Thorough. Teaching at a distance may encourage a teacher to be more thoughtful in planning instructional activities. When using some distance delivery systems, a degree of spontaneity may be sacrificed in order that predetermined materials arrive at distant locations in time to be used in class. Wise distance teachers use this fact as incentive for timely, thorough preparation of materials and for prior planning of instructional strategies.

Interaction. Interaction frequently is considered crucial to good teaching and learning environments. When working in distanced contexts, teachers may wish to be especially mindful of the opportunities for interaction that they build in to lessons. Simple strategies such as calling on students by name, assigning students from distant sites as spokespersons or equipment operators for the group, directing students to ask questions and interact directly with each other, assigning group tasks, requiring individual or group reports during class, and other activities that encourage interaction in face-to-face classrooms often can be translated to distanced classrooms. Though the attributes of some delivery systems may tend to limit interaction, wise distance teachers use their own creativity and expertise to overcome these limitations.

Kinks. Working with distance delivery systems usually means working with technology, and hardware glitches at one time or another. Distance teachers also will face kinks in the smooth operation of a distanced program due to human factors. Wise distance teachers do not let kinks in the system tie them up in knots, and they proceed to the best of their ability in the face of challenges.

Learners. Learners are a crucial variable in the successful distance education equation. Wise, learner-centered distance educators will realize that their educational philosophies and classroom strategies that focus the educational act on learners and learning rather than teachers and teaching can be translated to distance situations. Some of these strategies may include the use of student-negotiated learning contracts including identifying the objectives and grading criteria, a consideration of students' learning style preferences in instructional planning, and encouragement and validation of student ideas and comments.

Media. Media such as slides, laser discs, audio recordings, videotape, and graphics can be selected and incorporated appropriately into distanced contexts just as they are in live face-to-face teaching settings. Though copyright issues, distribution schedules, and fidelity of transmission are just a few of the concerns that arise when supplementing distance instruction with additional media, wise distance teachers realize that principles of communication and learning that support the use of educational media in face-to-face situations apply in distanced contexts as well.

Needs. Distance education currently is in vogue. Unfortunately, many educators select distance education as a trendy *solution* without determining what *the problem* is or whether a problem exists at all. A wise distance educator will help determine the needs of the school or institution which is considering distance teaching and learning options. Once needs are identified, distance delivery systems and solid

instructional design principles can assist in the development of appropriate distanced interventions.

Xerography. Distance education endeavors often extend beyond the dissemination of print-based instruction, but xerography, facsimile, and other print-based technologies still support distanced teaching endeavors. Distance teachers may choose to distribute copies of graphic and written information to distanced students to reinforce other teaching-learning activities. Wise distance teachers will take advantage of the speed and general accessibility of facsimile and xerographic technologies to supplement their distance teaching with print-based materials.

Organization. Distance teaching requires a great deal of organization on the part of the teacher and the many types of people involved in distanced endeavors. Wise distance teachers will draw upon principles of instructional design and development to help organize their instructional responsibilities and will work closely with colleagues to organize all aspects of the distanced teaching and learning experience.

Punctual. In many instances, distance delivery systems are leased, rented, or otherwise scheduled to be used for specific finite blocks of time. Some delivery technologies, such as satellite transmission, may begin and end precisely at predetermined times, regardless whether or not an instructor is running late to class or is in mid-sentence. Wise distance teachers will be punctual in starting and ending class sessions, particularly when the technology is unforgiving.

Repetition. The old adage, "Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them," rings true for distance educators. Distance teachers will soon learn that repetition of assignments, due dates, and key points is appreciated by distanced students who want to confirm that they are not losing any valuable information due to transmission noise or other technological or human interference. Wise distance teachers will repeat important points and confirm that the students have received the messages by asking students to restate the information themselves or to respond in other appropriate ways.

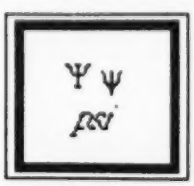
Simplicity. It may be a tendency of human nature that some educators want to use the newest, most complex, most dazzling technologies available, and this inclination often holds true in distance education contexts. However, the goals of a distance education endeavor often can be reached using simple delivery systems, alone or in hybrid combinations, in effective ways. Wise distance educators realize that simplicity of presentations and delivery systems often is virtuous.

Team. Team work is perhaps the single most important factor contributing to the success of a distance education endeavor. Teachers, students, staff, administration, technicians, site facilitators, vendors, production personnel, aides, instructional designers, and a variety of other people must coordinate efforts and share expertise in order to establish and maintain successful distance education programs. Wise distance teachers will be team players and will know that they can not be successful without the help of others.

Update. Technologies change. Teaching methods change. Instructional media and materials change. Students characteristics change. Course goals change. Wise distance teachers consistently update their knowledge of and expertise using distance delivery systems and modify their distance offerings to meet changing instructional demands.

Philosophy. Distance teachers frequently have formulated a philosophy of education that is reflected by their classroom style and teaching strategies. Distance education courses can be delivered using traditional lecture formats dominated by teacher talk or can be designed to reflect the perspective that teachers are facilitators, coaches, and mentors. Wise distance teachers recognize the aspects of their teaching philosophies that will translate well using distance delivery systems and then work with other members of the distance education team to make sure the delivery systems are used effectively to support their philosophy and style of teaching.

Humor. Even the most prepared distance teachers using the most reliable equipment supported by the most appropriate human, financial, and physical resources will have a bad day when something, if not everything, goes wrong. Wise distance teachers will maintain a sense of humor and perspective and will encourage their students and colleagues to do likewise.



Pshaw! Regardless of the teacher's skill, the distance program's effectiveness, and the participants' good humor, distance teachers may find themselves in situations where a four-letter expletive may be both appropriate and therapeutic. In those moments, wise distance teachers will rely instead on this exclamation of impatience, disapproval, irritation, or disbelief.

Optimistic. Engaging in distance teaching and learning is a continuing challenge that requires time and commitment. Learning the limitations of delivery systems, translating successful face-to-face lessons into distance contexts, and dealing with instructional and non-instructional student problems are just a few of the challenges of distance teaching. Wise distance teachers will remain optimistic about the opportunities distance education offers to their students and will value the opportunities for their own personal and professional growth.

Though this is the end of the Greek alphabet, this is not the end of the strategies that distance educators can incorporate into their teaching. Wise distance educators will continue to try new ideas, overcome new challenges, and devise new approaches to teaching at a distance. As distance education opportunities expand to influence increasing numbers of educators and educational consumers, entries are constantly added to this lexicon.

References

Garrison, D. R. (1990). *Understanding distance education: A framework for the future*. New York: Routledge.

Keegan, D. (1990). *Foundations of distance education*. New York: Routledge.

U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment. (1989, November). *Linking for learning: A new course for education*, OTA-SET-430 Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.